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Sarah Herda
 Director
 Storefront for Art and Architecture
 97 Kenmare Street
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Dear Ms. Herda,

I am pleased to present to you the traveling exhibition *Yves Klein: Air Architecture* featuring original drawings and objects by the French conceptual artist that trace the evolution of his quest for an immaterial architecture and "pure sensibility." Enclosed is an information packet to acquaint you with the project.

Curated by architect François Perrin, *Yves Klein: Air Architecture* is a small scale show of approximately 168 square feet with text panels, two videos and 22 works displayed in time capsule-like vitrines. An accompanying publication examines this little-known area of Klein's work and contextualizes it within today's tendencies toward de-materialization in art and design.

Klein's *Air Architecture* — proposals for structures and spaces defined by ephemeral materials such as air, fire, water, sound and scent — was informed by his spiritual and philosophical notions of breaking down the Modernist barrier of the glass wall and uniting nature and human experience. Drawings made in collaboration with architects Werner Ruhnau and Claude Parent express the artist's vision of an urban Edenic place where individuals live freely and in full embrace of technology.

I think you will find this little-known body of Yves Klein's work to be quite innovative and pertinent to contemporary tendencies in architecture, design and art. Please contact me if you have any questions or would like to book this exhibition for your venue. Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards,

Amy Hood
 Program Coordinator



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Yves Klein: Air Architecture

Background Information

Air Architecture gathers together for the first time, the architectural projects and theories of Yves Klein. Famous for his blue monochromes and provocative performances, Klein had a special interest in architecture as a prolongation of his practice. He designed, with the help of several architects, projects that were never realized because of his tragic death. Texts, drawings, photos, films and models are today a trace of this visionary research. Utopian in their time, his projects became realistic afterwards through the constant evolution of technologies. His dreams of the evolution of design towards immateriality can be experienced today in the works of many architects, artists and designers.

A publication will present the first translation of the lecture that Yves Klein gave at the Sorbonne in 1959 about his "Architecture of Air". Other of his texts related to the topic will also be translated for the first time. A selection of drawings, patents and photographs will illustrate the book along with essays by contemporary writers, that analyze his work and create links to other practices.

An exhibition of the documents related to the "Architecture of Air" will present a selection of the drawings that were co-produced by Yves Klein and the architects Werner Ruhnau and Claude Parent as well as pictures that document their research which took place at the "Gaz de France" and "Air Liquide" factory and videotapes of the 16mm films documenting his various performances and exhibitions. The exhibition design will include large scale vitrines to house the objects.

The exhibition begins its tour at the Schindler House (R.M. Schindler, 1921-22), thereby making a link between the vision of Rudolf Schindler and that of Yves Klein. Both Schindler and Klein explored the notion of space as the primary architectural statement, both understood the importance of climate as conditioning a new way of living closer to the elements, and both worked with the ultimate goal of changing the whole society.

The Architecture of Air*

In 1958, Yves Klein was commissioned by the German architect, Werner Ruhnau, to produce one of his famous blue monochrome for the entry hall of the Gelsenkirchen Opera. During the period when Klein worked on his piece, he often discussed his theories with Ruhnau. Among the actual proposals they seriously formulated was a design for the grand plaza in front of the theater.

The design featured an open space aligned with walls of fire and shallow pools "on which fire jets would dance in place of water jets." There would also be an outdoor cafeteria



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sheltered by an air roof - the archetype of a revolutionary mode of construction called "architecture of air"

In his writings Klein claims to have first conceived of fire fountains during his 1951 travels in Spain. When visiting the royal family's summer palace at Granja, with its formal gardens and traditional fountains in the style of Versailles, he imagined a landscape with water basins and fire jets.

The functional-psychological aim of water jets on expanses of water was to bring about a general freshness or at least a sensation of freshness. For countries with a less favorable climate, where there is severe cold for a long time during the winter, it is a luxury to have water jets. Therefore it is functional as well as being aesthetic-psychological to have jets of fire on a spatial, aquatic mirror base which thus constitutes an impassable and invisible barrier.

Applied to a roof structure, the natural, primal element of air - pure energy - would become a dynamic new construction material. A covering of compressed air would give direct access to the blue sky and to the boundless space of the universe. It would also climatize and protect privileged places of habitation and large geographic environments without enclosing them. The air roof would therefore be a vivid manifestation of immateriality - both as a philosophical, spiritual premise and as an architectural reality. For Klein, it signified a step beyond the tangible blue screen of the canvas "which deprives humans of the constant vision of the horizon"; and for Ruhnau, it advanced the cause of modernist design, as exemplified in glass-wall building, by removing "the last obstacle that a Mies van der Rohe has not yet known how to clear: the roof - the screen that separates us from the sky, from the blue of the sky."

In addition to performing experiments and drawing sketches related to the air roof and architecture of air concept, Klein and Ruhnau outlined their ideas in a written document, "Evolution generale de l'art actuel vers l'immortalisation (non pas dematerialisation)" December 15, 1958 (General evolution of current art toward immaterialization, not dematerialization). Here they specified that an air roof (serviced by blowers and collecting pipes as well as the energy from the sun and prevailing weather situations) would provide a means of permanent air circulation and shelter, while simultaneously heating or cooling a house, an area - or even an entire city. Through the use of colored vapors, the roof would also give protection from intense solar radiation. Air would be the major building material, complemented by such other immaterial elements as gas, fire, water, sound, scent, magnetic forces, electricity, and electronics.

Since all the functional machines, provisions, kitchens, bathrooms, and storage areas would be located underground, the living spaces would truly exist as open realms, devoid of all things and without any of the customary room divisions or barriers between



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interior and exterior domains. An entire expanse of habitation would therefore exist as a boundless, undefined space, except that the residential and leisure zones would be separated from the work and industry districts.

Because the architecture of air placed primacy on the elements of nature, all construction would be adapted to given and natural conditions. It would try not to make great artificial modifications to mountains, valleys, or even climatic conditions like monsoon winds. Of central importance to Klein was the idea that architecture would no longer be considered in terms of constructing or designing discrete, man-made dwellings: "Architecture is space and thus it is everything." Given this fundamental attitude, the goal was to reclaim space - to enable people to live in the open air on the entire surface of the earth. The whole of nature would effectively become an immense living room.

The proposals may not have been workable but they were conceptually well ahead of their time, an augur of the ecological consciousness, a focus on natural elements and energy-efficient construction that would take root some years later. Based on a faith in the creative potential of his ideas, Klein patented the architecture of air (the air roof) on April 14, 1959.

In characteristic fashion, Klein was not content simply to create innovative designs or write manifestos. He wanted to make his ideas known to a wide audience. He therefore arranged for himself and Ruhnau to present special lectures on June 3 and 5, 1959 at the prestigious Parisian institute of higher learning, the Sorbonne. The speech was a compilation of his theories and a history of his artistic endeavors geared to show his overarching concern with the immaterial. He touched on such topics as space, pure imagination, sensibility, egoistic expression, the center of Sensibility, fire, water, aerial movement, gestural art, artistic slavery to technique, the void, monochrome painting, pure powdered pigment, the color blue, monotone music and the architecture of air.

Klein took great pride in the contents of his speech and immediately sought to publish his text and that of Ruhnau (a survey of the evolution of immateriality in architecture, featuring a history of theater design that included outdoor arenas ; climatized interior spaces, like Palladio's Vicenza auditorium with its ceiling painted as a sky; recent exemplars of innovative glass-encased, non-partitioned halls, like Mies van der Rohe's national Theater in Mannheim; Frei Otto's suspended-roof constructions; his own Gelsenkirchen project; and the Klein-Ruhnau architecture-of-air drawings). The publication was ultimately not realized.

After the Sorbonne lecture, Klein continued to pursue the architecture-of-air concept, particularly expanding the idea of climatizing a vast geographic residential space. he began working with a young French architect, Claude Parent, and his draftsman, Sargologo, to produce non-technological depictions that both vivified some of the



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innovative elements and showed how life would be lived in the new environment. The drawings present futuristic images of a community of individuals who tranquilly go about their daily routines in a naturalistic, outdoor setting. The landscape is an open expanse of space without any of the traditional architectural enclosures above ground and with transparent glass forming a surface over the underground service areas. Localized air, fire, and water jets, as well as a grand roof of flowing air, climatize the territory, and additional air jets create chairs and beds – aerial platforms (immaterial furnishings) that massage the body with continuous air pulsations and sustain it in a state of rest and relaxation, floating in space.

The concept of secrecy, still common in our world, has disappeared in this city which is flooded with light and completely open to the outside. A new atmosphere of human intimacy prevails. The inhabitants live naked. The former patriarchal structure of the family no longer exists. The community is perfect, free, individualistic, impersonal. The main activity of the inhabitants is leisure.

The architecture of air thus expanded beyond habitation, envisions the social dynamics that would shape the community. Priority was given to propagating an ambience of freedom, a return to nature, and a heightened consciousness of space and immateriality. Everyday life would be simple but the process of simplification would entail radical transformations in basic human habits. For example nudity would become a prevailing condition and it would assert an un-customary openness among individuals. "Each of our gestures and physical, visible activities will become exposed to the eyes of everyone... (It might also) be possible in such a society, to see each of the thoughts and psychological states of others." This would then upset conventional relationships and transform the very notion of intimacy.

One will no longer be able to hide anything in such an architecture of air. It is thus really an important step on the path to the return to Eden, where we will live again without shame, one with the other. We will play, each one in our own way, our psychological role on the stage of the world, before the eyes of the universe; and our real life, our love for life, will play with all that formerly played with us - feelings, emotions, passion, in short, all the complexes at full strength.

For Klein, the architecture of air was consistent with a return to Eden - not a turn back to the past, to a paradise lost, but a move forward to a new Eden, a modernized world made paradise-like by a transformed approach to living and thinking. Unlike the back-to-nature, anti-urban, anti-modernity crusade that gained prominence a decade later with the hippie culture in the United States, this was not motivated by a desire to escape. Indeed, the architecture-of-air civilization was envisioned as urban. It unconditionally incorporated a sector for work, industry, and mechanical equipment, although this was explicitly separated from the living, leisure sector. Moreover, the new Eden avidly embraced innovative technology. As a citizen of the mid-twentieth century, Klein was inspired by scientific advances, and yet his creativity was neither dependent on nor limited by them. Far more important than relying on any laboratory results or



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pragmatic considerations, he embraced the imagination as his guide. Without losing sight of the marvelous and without being constrained by fact, evidence, or reason, he sought to reconceptualize Eden.

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As an artistic endeavor, the architecture of air was a seminal part of Klein's life work. It embodied his theories about immateriality, space, and sensibility and did so in a grandiose way by speaking globally about broad concepts of design and civilization. Here, as with so many of his artistic ventures, the main concern was not about creating a new image or object - although creativity did not stop at the idea phase - but about revolutionizing thinking and experience. He went outside the usual confines of art to embrace the whole environment and to conceptualize a deep reorientation of human nature. With one foot poised in the realm of philosophy and the other firmly rooted in the realm of publicity, he aimed for an awakening - a new beginning that remembered the past, the primal elements, at the same time as it imagined the unknown, the indefinable, the miraculous reality of the future-present.

*The above text was excerpted from [Yves Klein](#) by Sidra Stich, Stuttgart: Cantz Verlag, 1994.

